

The Rule of 20 (or 22)

When we are not sure whether to open a hand or not, we apply the Rule of 20:

- count the length of the two longest suits together (in pieces), then
- add that to your high card points (HCP).
- When the total is 20 or more, open the bidding.

It is imperative that you have 2 ½ quick tricks! (This is why they now call it the Rule of 22.)

You must have no wasted doubleton honor values such as Qx, Jx, QJ.

Examples:

1) AQ543 87 A9852 --	10 HCP plus 5 ♠s plus 5 ♦s <hr/> = 20 -- Open 1 ♠	2) KQ75 A432 7 K87	12 HCP plus 4 ♥s plus 4 ♣s <hr/> = 20 -- Open 1 ♣
3) 42 Q737 AKQ875 9	11 HCP plus 4 ♥s plus 6 ♦s <hr/> = 21 -- Open 1 ♦	4) AQ532 A864 532 10	19 HCP plus 5 ♠s plus 4 ♥s <hr/> = 19 -- Pass
5) Q976 QJ43 QJ2 A6	12 HCP plus 4 ♠s plus 4 ♥s <hr/> Sub-total 20, but downgrade for too many Q's and J's, and not enough quick tricks. PASS THIS ONE!	6) A764 542 A102 A87	12 HCP plus 4 ♠s plus 3 ♥s <hr/> Sub-total 19, but upgrade for 3 quick tricks! Open this one 1 ♣

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

	♠ 4		
	♥ A 10 9 6 5 2		
	♦ A Q 7		
	♣ 8 5 3		
♠ J 5 3	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: 30px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	♠ K 9 7	
♥ 8 7		♥ Q J	
♦ K J 10 5		♦ 9 8 6 4 3	
♣ A Q 7 6		♣ K 10 4	
	♠ A Q 10 8 6 2		
	♥ K 4 3		
	♦ 2		
	♣ J 9 2		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 ♥	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	4 ♥
All pass			

Auction Commentary: North's hand has too many outside features to open a "weak-2." It's got 12 points, a 6-piece suit, great shape, and 2-1/2 defensive tricks. (And if you find a fit, the hand has 7 losers, which is the equivalent of an opener.) Responder bids a forcing 1 ♠ to hear opener's rebid before supporting the heart suit. Then he upgrades his hand with a singleton ♦ and bids a game.

Opening Lead: 4 ♣ - leading the BOTTOM OF SOMETHING (BOSTON), we lead low from what we have.

Planning the Play: In a suit contract, count your losers from the position of the master hand - (the one with the long trumps): there are 3 quick ♣ losers, and on this lead we're sure going to lose them quickly ;) 2 ♦ losers, but partner has a singleton ♦, so we look to ruff the 2 losing ♦s in the dummy. I started with 1 ♠ loser, but partner has that Ace! Let's hope the ♥s break nicely.

After winning 3 ♣ tricks, the defenders don't want to lead that ♠ suit, and it looks like declarer will plan to ruff ♦s in the dummy. They switch to a trump in hopes of preventing those ruffs.

Declarer needs to realize that the ♦ finesse is not necessary. With 3 tricks lost already, we can't afford another on a 50% finesse. Instead, win the trump shift, play the A♦, ruff a ♦, play a ♠ to ruff in your hand, then ruff the other ♦. Now pull trumps with your fingers crossed that they behave -- and when they do, you've lost exactly 3 tricks and made this contract.

Takeaway: When opening a "Weak-Two," you should not have 2 Aces, and there should be no more than one outside feature -- (either a singleton or an outside King). These hands are too strong for a preemptive bid. With just 20 HCP, this hand makes game!

Board 4

West Deals
Both Vul

		♠ 5 3		
		♥ J 5 3		
		♦ Q J 3		
		♣ Q 10 8 7 3		
♠ K 10 9 6 2			♠ A Q J 8 7	
♥ 9 7 6			♥ 8 4	
♦ K 10 5 4			♦ A 8 7 6	
♣ A			♣ 9 5	
		♠ 4		
		♥ A K Q 10 2		
		♦ 9 2		
		♣ K J 6 4 2		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	
Pass	Pass	1 ♠	2 ♠	
4 ♠	All pass			

Auction Commentary: The Rule of 20 (or 22) works in this third seat: East has 11 HCP, adds the length of the two longest suits (+9) and gets to 20. You also need 2.5 defensive tricks -- and the points must be in the two suits. South makes a Michael's Cuebid, showing at least 5/5 in the other major and an undisclosed minor. West knows about the 10-card fit, so using the "LOTT" - (Law of Total Tricks) -- West takes the ♠s to game.

Opening Lead: A♥ (promising at least the K♥ behind it)

Planning the Play: Counting losers in a suit contract, there are 2 ♥ losers, and we hope just 1 ♦ loser if the ♦s behave. When we are missing an odd number of cards in a suit, (like missing 5 ♦s hers), they tend to divide as evenly as possible. 68% of the time, these will break 3/2. The hand should make.

Board 7

South Deals
None Vul

		♠ A J 9 7		
		♥ J 5 4		
		♦ K 4 3		
		♣ 9 8 5		
♠ 8 6 4 3			♠ K Q 10 2	
♥ A K 2			♥ 8 6 3	
♦ Q J 10 7			♦ A 9 8 2	
♣ 4 2			♣ Q 3	
		♠ 5		
		♥ Q 10 9 7		
		♦ 6 5		
		♣ A K J 10 7 6		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	
			1 ♣	
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	2 ♣	
Pass	3 ♣	All pass		

Auction Commentary: South has 10 HCP, plus the length of the two longest suits is 10, which meets the first part of the Rule of 22 -- the total here must be at least 20. The hand also has all its points in its two suits, and there are 2.5 defensive tricks. That Q♥ has "stuffing" -- the 9-10♥ is good enough to warrant an extra trick. When responder bids 1♠, be very careful not to "reverse" by bidding 2♥. It would show a hand with 17-18+ points, and you'll get too high in this auction! Rebidding 2♣ better describes this hand. Responder invites (as the "LOTT" says we can bid to the 3-level holding a combined 9 pieces of trumps), and hopes that partner would like to try 3NT. No dice, though, South is happy to pass and play in 3♣.

Opening Lead: A♥ (promising the K♥ behind it). Although there is also a sequence of ♦ honors, choosing the A♥ will get to see the dummy, to decide what to do next!

Planning the Play: Counting the losers from the position of the master hand, (South, the one with the long trumps), there are 2♦s and 2♥s. (Thanks, partner, for that terrific J♥!) It looks like we're going to make our 3♣ contract.

Defensive Commentary: East plays a small ♥ on partner's opening A♥ lead, telling West they don't hold the Q♥ so it might be dangerous to continue them. Looking at dummy, it is automatic for West to switch to the Q♦, hopefully trapping the K♦, while keeping control of the heart suit. (If East holds the A♦, East can't lead the suit, because she wants to keep the A♦ over the K♦ in dummy!)

Takeaway: When we have a long minor combined, it's preferable to try to play in 3NT. There are fewer tricks required for a game in NT than a game in our minor, and the 3NT game will pay better than a partscore in the minor. But in this hand, its shape shies away from NT. (It's ironic that although they can't even enter the auction, the opponents have a hand that could make 3NT!)